

Series Cover Note

Three working papers on the small-drone threat to political leadership: what the weapon is, whether it can be stopped, and where U.S. authority leaves the gap.

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UNCLASSIFIED // OPEN SOURCE • NOT OFFICIAL U.S. GOVERNMENT ANALYSIS

Series Cover Note

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Working paper series — open-source analysis; not official U.S. government analysis

Bottom line

Small drones are a mature, cheap, commercially available precision weapon, and they have already reached heads of government, defended infrastructure, and military bases (Paper I). No state has shown that it can reliably stop one launched close-in over a populated area — including the People’s Republic of China, which operates the most complete publicly documented prevention regime — because the binding limits are physics, identification, and collateral risk, not authority or budget (Paper II). U.S. law after the SAFER SKIES Act still leaves that case, a launch from private property adjacent to a protected site in the National Capital Region, in the seam among foreign-investment review, airspace rules, and counter-UAS authority (Paper III).

What follows from it

Risk is reduced before launch, not at the moment of engagement. Interceptors, high-power microwave, and pre-delegated authority are worth acquiring, but none restores the warning time a close-in launch removes. The measures that move risk are prevention and detection, and in the National Capital Region those are largely voluntary, eroding, or not yet in force.

Priority recommendations

1. **A statutory geo-awareness requirement** for unmanned aircraft sold or operated in the United States, covering a defined national-security site list. This restores by mandate the manufacturer geofencing withdrawn voluntarily in 2025.
2. **Finalization of the FAA § 2209 rule** with an express designation pathway for leadership protective sites, and publication of those restrictions in machine-readable form.
3. **A pre-coordinated sensing and engagement framework** for designated protective zones in the National Capital Region that expressly covers privately owned adjacent airspace and structures, with civil-liberties and airspace-safety safeguards. This reduces decision latency; it is not a terminal solution.

What is asked

- A classified interagency briefing (Secret Service, DHS, DOJ) on counter-UAS coverage of private structures adjacent to protected sites and on the engagement timeline against a launch from one.
- Support for the two statutory measures in the next available bill, and direction to the FAA on § 2209.

- A status report on certification of National Capital Region state and local agencies under the interim final rule. Their spectrum authority rests on a 180-day FCC grant that expires in late December 2026 unless extended.

The three papers

Paper I — Not Science Fiction. Establishes existence, maturity, and availability of the weapon; makes no claim about defenses.

Paper II — The Terminal Residual. Shows that terminal defense fails in the close-in case across regime types, using China as the maximal prevention case and the Russia-Ukraine war as the capability ceiling.

Paper III — The Adjacent-Launch Seam. Identifies six residual seams in U.S. authority after the SAFER SKIES Act and sets out ranked oversight and legislative options.

The series contains no operational method, targeting, or tradecraft, and identifies no private property or party. Confidence levels follow ICD 203. Several cited matters are unadjudicated allegations and are labeled as such in the papers.

DISCLOSURE

Author's Statement on Sources and Independence

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